

Preliminary Findings

STUDY 1 – Incorporating Minimum Accessible Standards in New Housing: A Survey of Access Consultants and Architects

This report is the first of two studies investigating accessible housing conducted through the Summer Foundation–La Trobe University research program. These reports provide an evidence base to inform decision-makers on incorporating minimum mandatory accessibility standards in the 2022 National Construction Code (NCC).

Incorporating accessible standards in the NCC will have a wide range of benefits for the estimated 3 million Australians living with mobility limitations. However, to date there has been little systematic evidence available on the cost and difficulty of including specific features in all new dwellings. This study fills this gap by seeking the expert opinions of access consultants and architects on how expensive and complicated it would be for builders to incorporate specific accessible features into all new homes.

Aim: to establish the relative cost and difficulty of including accessible features in new dwellings.

Respondents: 24 access consultants and architects with expert knowledge of the Livable Housing Australia Design Guidelines.

Method: respondents were asked to rate the relative cost and difficulty of incorporating 28 accessible features into new houses, apartments, and townhouses. The features were derived from the 15 features in the Livable Housing Australia Design Guidelines.

Key Findings

1. A total of 12 features are inexpensive and easy to incorporate in all dwellings, including:
 - Width of pathways to entrances, and the width of the entrance door
 - Toilets in bathrooms are located in a corner
 - Heights of switches, power outlets, door handles and windowsills
 - Door and tap hardware
 - Slip-resistant flooring
2. Features that are costly or difficult to incorporate in one type of dwelling may be inexpensive and simple in another.
3. Including accessible features during the design phase of new builds is the best way to ensure cost-effectiveness.
4. Targeted exemptions to standards could mitigate issues arising in the minority of homes with site-specific challenges, including complex topography.

Conclusion

Survey respondents rated nearly half of the features as being both “virtually cost neutral” and “not difficult at all” to include across all types of new housing. Many of these are common-sense design features that are already usual industry practice. This indicates that a substantial proportion of the accessible features could be feasibly incorporated as mandatory minimum accessibility standards. This study found that a design-led approach to incorporating minimum accessible standards into new homes can accommodate accessible features with minimal extra cost or impact on amenity.

Table 1. Cost-difficulty ratings of incorporating accessible features into new dwellings (1 = not difficult/virtually cost neutral; 16 = very difficult/high cost), ranked lowest to highest for houses

Design feature	House	Apartment	Townhouse
Height of switches	1.00	1.00	1.00
Height of power outlets	1.00	1.00	1.00
Door hardware	1.00	1.00	1.00
Height of door handles	1.05	1.00	1.00
Laundry space	1.05	1.16	1.05
Tap hardware	1.11	1.11	1.11
Windowsill height	1.28	1.45	1.45
Shower size	1.37	1.61	1.49
Entrance door width	1.39	1.44	1.44
Toilet in bathroom located in corner	1.74	1.86	1.90
Width of pathway to entrance	1.77	1.66	1.78
Slip-resistant flooring	1.84	1.84	1.84
Toilet on ground floor	2.22	2.00	3.19
Shower on ground floor	2.22	2.07	5.38
Removable shower screen	2.22	2.28	2.28
Space adjacent to shower	2.29	3.92	3.80
Transition height for different floor surfaces	2.48	2.28	2.48
Ground (or entry level) bedroom space	2.51	2.76	4.60
Step-free shower entry	2.51	3.43	3.08
Internal door and corridor widths	2.57	2.75	3.25
Reinforcement of bathroom and toilet walls	2.66	2.76	2.76
Space in front of toilet	2.92	4.73	4.49
Internal stairways - no winders	2.94	3.40	4.32
Kitchen space	2.95	4.00	4.52
Closet toilet walls	3.13	4.10	4.22
Step-free entrance to residence	3.24	1.96	3.65
Step-free pathway to entrance	3.47	2.43	4.20
Provision for future stair-climber or lift	5.38	3.18	6.31

LOWEST COST-DIFFICULTY

HIGHEST-COST/DIFFICULTY

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